



Free export seminar Jan. 21 for specialty and artisan cheese companies

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Wisconsin ranks as the nation's top cheese producing state, and at 660 million pounds, specialty cheese accounted for 23 percent of Wisconsin's total cheese production in 2014, an increase of 19.7 million pounds over 2013.

Industry experts say even more specialty cheese could find its way into international markets if the export process was simplified for specialty cheese processors unaccustomed to dealing with international marketplaces.

Towards that end, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP's) International Trade Team is partnering with the U.S. Dairy Council to host a no-cost seminar that will explore cost savings through consolidated shipping loads of Wisconsin specialty cheeses to international markets. The seminar, aimed at Wisconsin specialty and artisan cheese companies, will be held Thursday, Jan. 21, 8:30 a.m.-noon, at the Hilton Garden Inn in Green Bay.

In addition to hearing about the new pilot program, seminar attendees will also learn about an opportunity to exhibit with DATCP and the U.S. Dairy Export Council at Food and Hotel Asia in Singapore, April 12-15, 2016. Companies attending the Singapore conference will share free booth space, sample products, and network with Asian buyers.

Lisa Stout, economic development specialist with DATCP's International Trade Team, said the group consolidation project holds significant promise for expanding current – and opening new – global markets for Wisconsin's dairy products. "This new pilot program is designed to create the means to consolidate dairy shipments from Wisconsin and minimize shipping hurdles that the specialty or artisan cheese companies could face."

Wisconsin cheesemakers are known for offering a wide variety of high quality specialty cheeses. A specialty cheese is a value-added product which commands a premium price. According to the Wisconsin Specialty Cheese Institute, the nature of specialty cheese is derived from one or more unique qualities, such as exotic origin, particular processing or design, limited supply, unusual application or use, and extraordinary packaging or channel of sale. The common denominator is its very high quality.

Of the state's 127 cheese plants, 91 manufactured at least one type of specialty cheese during 2014. Feta accounted for the largest share of specialty cheese production, with 12 percent of the total. Blue, Havarti, Hispanic types, specialty Mozzarella, Parmesan Wheel, and specialty Provolone remain other popular varieties. Italian Fontina cheese production rose 27 percent last year over the previous year, while Romano Wheel production was 20 percent higher.

Lunch will be provided at the Jan. 21st seminar.

Persons interested in attending should RSVP by January 19th to Lisa Stout (lisa.stout@wisconsin.gov/608-224-5126).